

Catalogue in my book

SPEECH

OF

HON. WILLIAM H. KEIM,

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

ON THE

REVISION OF THE TARIFF,

DELIVERED IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 10TH, 1859.

WASHINGTON:
THOMAS MCGILL, PRINTER
1859.

Handwritten text at the top of the page, possibly a title or date, which is mostly illegible due to blurring.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

SPEECH.

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. KEIM rose and said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN : I design to occupy the attention of the committee as briefly as may be. I represent a district which is familiarly known as "Old Berks," and which is, perhaps, as largely interested in the iron manufacture as any in the Union. My advent here, with my political antecedents, has caused some surprise throughout the country. The enigma is of easy solution. The great and radical change was caused by the principle of protection to labor. The people, the Warwicks of our time, who make and unmake the ruling power, true to their interests, arose in their might, threw off the shackles of party, and now stand redeemed and disenthralled ! And there they will remain, until you foster those interests which will enable them to maintain their families, found a home, and educate their children, to become the intelligent and reliable supporters of the laws and the Constitution. I aver, most emphatically and distinctly, that no party can gain the vote of my district that opposes protection for the sake of protection. Berks county has performed no unimportant service in political history. The fate of the next presidential election may depend upon its decision. In all presidential elections in the State, since 1836, the Democratic majority has been less than five thousand ; and, as no President can be elected without Pennsylvania, a change like the last special congressional election, of seven thousand five hundred votes, will decide this contest in favor of those who sustain the dominant interest of the district. But while I ask protection to the iron trade, I desire all the manufacturing and agricultural interests promoted, North and South. Why not support American labor in preference to the pauper labor of Europe ? If not as a matter of policy, I ask it as a tribute to humanity to save those who are suffering the pangs of want.

That the committee may understand the operation of the financial and manufacturing revulsion in the district I have the honor to represent, I would state that the two leading channels of transportation of anthracite coal from the Schuylkill coal-fields pass through the county of Berks from North to South, and through the city of Reading. The coal delivered at Reading by the canal and railroad in 1857, was 137,602 tons ; in 1858, was 95,056 tons ; the difference between which was 40,000 tons and upwards, or about thirty per cent. less in 1858 than in the year 1857. It is true that taking the product of all the fields, there

was an increase of about 60,000 tons in 1858 over the year before—the figure of that vast interest being carried up to 6,491,000 tons, a production never surpassed but in one year, namely, in 1856, when it realized 6,751,000 tons. The steady increase of production follows the domestic and manufacturing demand, and the production is carried forward, in spite of the revulsion, by the constantly opening new markets for domestic use. It is at the iron manufacturing points, like Reading and Phoenixville, that we see the diminution for manufacturing purposes. If manufactures had not been paralyzed, the production of the anthracite in 1858 should have, and would have, reached 7,000,000 tons. Indeed, the production of that coal had experienced no backset, if I may so call it, since 1838. In that year the production was 738,000 tons, from which it has grown, without a single year of diminished production, until the year 1857, when it reached the total I have mentioned.

The diminution I have adverted to at such points as Reading, centres of manufacture, grow out of the stoppage of furnaces, forges, and of steam-driven machinery of all kinds; out of the diminished production of iron and of its various manufactures. The use of forty thousand tons less of coal in one year, in Reading, than in another next preceding it, implies to one, conversant with the business of our people, a very grave and serious interruption of that business in every department. Think for a moment of what a vast industry that amount of coal, at that single point, was an exponent! Think of the engine fires that were extinguished; of the furnaces out of blast; of the operatives directly employed about the engines and furnaces, thrown out of work; of the mines of coal and of iron ore to supply those furnaces, those engines; of the vast carrying apparatus by railroad, by canal, by the cart, all turned adrift without work. And then, looking for a moment beyond all this, at all the producing and mercantile classes, how they must have been affected by the prostration of that great interest whose industry it was their function to supply—you have before you society, in the full rule of life and vigor, suddenly smitten down, credit ruined; debt almost annihilated, confidence between man and man almost blotted out, patient honest industry brought to beggary, and no class flourishing.

This is the faintest possible picture of what took place in that noble district, which I have the proud honor to represent. Is it strange that I am here? I tell you, sir, that Berks is, this day, as loyal to her ancient sentiments, and is as ready to endorse them by her vast majorities, as ever she was. Her principles stand as unshaken as her own eternal and glorious hills. Her people are as true to them as to their religious faith. They are like that grand old monk, who is the type of the German race, who con-

cluded his appeal to the Emperor and Princes of the Empire in those memorable words, "*Hier stehe ich; ich kann nicht anders; so hilf mich Gott.*" And there they do stand, full of truth and loyalty, and there they will stand; aye, sir, there they will stand; so help me God!

They are a confiding people. With them, confidence is, perhaps, a plant of slow growth, but when it has grown it is like tearing their heart-strings to pluck it out from their hearts. They love whom they can trust, with a love surpassing that of woman. They will not listen to the suggestions of every super-serviceable knave that would breathe a tarnishing slander on a trusted one. The county, whose every twelfth man is a uniformed volunteer, which, having one-thirtieth of the population of the State, furnishes one-tenth of its citizen soldiery, is full of a truly gallant and chivalrous spirit, peaceful, orderly, law-abiding, honest, just. In times past this people reorganized, and were proud to follow the leadership of such men as Joseph Hiester, Henry A. Muhlenberg, John Ritter; honest men, every one of them, and trusted, loved, and honored, not merely up to their latest breath, but now, in memory. These were leaders fit to follow. They were Democrats, while there was a Democratic party. Hiester voted for the Missouri compromise, Muhlenberg repeatedly for tariffs for protection, Ritter for the Wilmot proviso. Who ever doubted their Democracy? Yet these great measures, to-day, stink in the nostrils of those who would affect to lead that Democracy. I would not vote, perhaps, as Mr. Ritter voted on that question, for I do not, as at present advised, believe that Congress has any right to legislate slavery *into* or *out* of the public domain.

The people of the district I represent were called upon to stultify themselves; to throw away all their old principles, and take up with the new ones, of late, and not happy, inventions. They were never very extreme tariff men, still they were for some protection, protection that would at least put our labor on fair terms with that of other countries. They hate negroes, and have no affection for slavery; they would leave it alone where it is, and not prevent its going where the people really wish to have it. They are for letting the people govern themselves. All this, in very fact, they were called upon to abandon. With regard to the tariff, the wolf was at their own door. They wanted no glosing speeches to persuade them that all was right, when they saw and felt that all was wrong. They felt insulted by the miserable sophistry and falsehood that was attempted to be imposed upon them. The solemn and secret pledges and promises for the future they scouted when they thought of the broken and dishonored ones of the past.

These were the antecedents of the election last fall in that district. The people did not abandon anything. They only

would not follow the new lights. As to my being an old Whig, of which I am not at all ashamed, why the very head of the organization against me was a gentleman who followed "that same old coon" as ardently as I ever did my myself. Whig, indeed! If I am not mistaken, the very governing and directing energy of this Administration, at this very time, is none other than what was ever Whig.

The views expressed by the President in his late annual message upon the subject of the tariff, are those to which that great party, to which he is said to belong, has never committed itself, nationally. No school of political economy, neither the protection or the free-trade school, has ever been able to obtain from that party a distinct, unequivocal endorsement of its system. The resolutions of national conventions, and the letters of presidential candidates have been drawn with a studied reserve of meaning. The art of such compositions seemed to consist in such a use of words as could conceal the writer's real views, or, at least, leave them open to conflicting constructions, as suited the particular localities in which the construction was to be made.

While I thus arraign the fair dealings of the Democratic party upon this subject, I would not be understood to say or imply, that the other great party, of which Henry Clay was the embodiment, was entirely guiltless in this respect. He, who was the soul of that party, never wavered or faltered; but the party sometimes nationally, often locally, presented views which were not in harmony with each other.

All this is a natural and necessary consequence of bringing the tariff into the vortex of party politics. The Democratic party has, it is true, in these latter years, mainly advocated the doctrines of free trade; yet, locally, there are parts of the country where it has been compelled to renounce and denounce free trade. Mr. Polk's letter to John K. Kane was intended to serve a double purpose. The letter may have meant nothing; yet it was made to mean enough to get the electoral vote of some tariff States. The same game has been unsuccessfully played since; but it is now about played out, as my standing here, in the presence of this committee, and as the fate of some of my respected colleagues, and other gentlemen who were candidates for seats in the next Congress from the tariff States, may be taken to indicate. The tariff should not be made a party question; it should be framed by all parties to subserve the laboring interests of the country.

The President undoubtedly expresses the views of my whole constituency, and, I believe, of ninety-five hundredths of the people of Pennsylvania, with regard to the moral and financial superiority of specific over *ad valorem* duties; and I suppose I may say that Mr. Secretary Cobb expresses the views of the

other five-hundredths ; that is to say, of the five per cent. of the population, who are Federal officeholders, or who are financially interested in the free trade or *ad valorem*s. In the time of General Jackson, it was considered important that the President and his Cabinet should be "*a unit*" in opinion and sentiment. We all remember the disruption of a Cabinet of his which was deficient in this unity. They had not then learned the art of "agreeing to disagree," which is one of the arts and mysteries of our later politics. It is convenient for an Administration to present a double face on such a question as this of the tariff: one section can swear by the President, and be orthodox—another by the Secretary, and not be heretodox: one is of Paul, another of Apollos, yet both of the same faith. I have no fault to find with this state of things ; indeed, it indicates a toleration from which the happiest consequences may be anticipated. "Specific duties" are, at least, no terrible heresies, and "*ad valorem*s" are not such truths as that one doubting them must infallibly be excommunicated from the Democratic party.

The agricultural interests of the country require as much protection as any other. It is a well-established fact, that in the manufacture of goods of all kinds, fifty per cent. of the products of the farmer enter into the composition as labor in the shape of food, wool, leather, &c. During one year, the importations into the United States amounted to \$362,000,000, consequently the import of the productions of the farm amounted to \$181,000,000. Think of that, and ponder it well, farmers !

Besides, with the excessive importations and balance of trade against us, the precious metals must be sent out of the country, thus creating fluctuations and revulsions disastrous to the stability and well-being of the community.

I am not going to afflict the committee with a citation of the opinions of the whole unbroken line of our great statesmen in favor of the policy of protection. Those opinions are familiar to this House and to the country, as household words. Protection is the defensive policy of a State—that which husband its resources, develops its skill, renders industrious, happy, prosperous, its people. If ever there was a country, which, more than any other, was bound by the highest duty to itself, to look after the industry, prosperity, and happiness of its people, this is that country. For this is the country in which the people are sovereign, which is ruled, not by a king over the people, but by the *king-people* itself.

What is the policy of this people with regard to labor ? Shall it raise American labor up to a higher level than the labor of all the rest of the earth, or shall it sink American labor down to the level of that wretched, European from-hand-to-mouth pauperism, which is the lot of labor in the Old World ? It is not a

question of protecting iron or any other product of labor, but of protecting labor itself. It is not for her *iron* that Pennsylvania asks specific duties, but for the *men* who makes that iron. She would not have her fifty thousand sons who are engaged in making or manufacturing iron, reduced to the European level. Would you reduce the labor of this country to starvation? Remember that, in the free States, that labor votes. It is educated, it reads, it thinks, it acts for itself. It bears in its hand the rod of empire. And will this House, which lives but in the breath of its nostrils—will this House turn a deaf ear not only to the voice of that labor, uttered so emphatically last fall, but to the voice of true policy, as well?

If the government of our great cities is every day becoming more difficult; if, in these, our American solution of the problem of man's capacity for self-government is becoming overcast with doubts and fears; if the eight hundred policemen of Philadelphia, and the twelve hundred or more of New York—*uniformed and armed*—are necessary, in those cities, for the imperfect protection of life and property; if the city of New York shivered with alarm, when the evil-genius of its executive magistrate almost arrayed the poor in arms against the rich, in the winter of 1857–58, I would ask: why that difficulty of government, why these doubts and fears, why that vast police force, why that alarm in New York? It is largely because of the inadequate or precarious reward of labor; because of low wages and unsteady employment. Men cannot be brought together in masses, and left idle. How much better for the country would it be, if those fine, able-bodied policemen could be disbanded; if the mace and the revolver could be taken from their hands, and the implements of honest and honorable toil substituted.

Our ill legislation is the curse of those cities, and it will make those cities, if we persevere in it, the curse of the country. You cannot give those cities over to anarchy and misrule. You cannot degrade and pauperize their industrial population down to the European level, without inflicting infinite harm upon the whole country. Convert that population into a brutal, ferocious, licentious mob, and you will feel the effects of it in the remotest, smallest hamlet in the land. And you will make them such a mob, by civil-law-making, affecting their labor; for laws can make or unmake the moral character of a people. A people whose labor is not well rewarded, cannot, if that last long, continue to be free. The intelligence of a people is much, their virtue is much, their religion much, all these may long hold them up, enable them to endure, but all these will give way if the physical well-being of a people is not kept up to the level of their moral and intellectual development. A people like ours is worth making every effort to save; for if it goes down, with it will go down the hopes of mankind forever.